

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4731
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3691

EXDIS

FOR SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: LE OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS)
SUBJ: SITUATION IN LEBANON ON EVE OF SECRETARY'S VISIT

1. SUMMARY. FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS OFFERED AS PERHAPS USEFUL TO YOU IN PUTTING LEBANESE SITUATION INTO PERSPECTIVE. BRIEFLY, WHILE THERE HAS BEEN PROGRESS SINCE YOUR LAST VISIT, THE RATE AT WHICH IT HAS OCCURRED HAS BEEN DISAPPOINTING AND BASIC PROBLEMS WHICH YOU DISCUSSED IN FEBRUARY REMAIN MORE OR LESS AS THEY WERE. END SUMMARY.

2. INTERNAL.

THE FIRST PHENOMENON THAT STRIKES US IN OUR DAILY DEALINGS WITH THE LEBANESE IS THE LACK OF MOVEMENT. THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT HAS NEVER PLAYED A VERY ACTIVE ROLE IN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FIELDS. POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES HAVE BEEN TOO INHIBITING. EVERY PROPOSED ACTION MUST BE EXAMINED TO DETERMINE
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ITS IMPACT ON THE CONFESSIONAL BALANCE, OR ON THE INTERESTS OF FEUDAL LEADERS LIKE CHAMOUN OR JUMBLATT. NO LEADER CAN AFFORD TO BE TOO FAR OUT IN FRONT FOR FEAR OF EXCITING OPPOSITION AND HE MUST BE CAREFUL ABOUT UNEQUIVOCAL POSITIONS REGARDING FELLOW POLITICIANS AND BUREAUCRATS FOR FEAR THIS WILL BE HELD AGAINST HIM LATER. THE RESULT IS RULE BY INDIRECTION AND LEAST COMMON DENOMINATOR, AND RELIANCE ON PRIVATE INITIATIVE RATHER THAN GOVERNMENT

LEADERSHIP.

3. IN THE AFTERMATH OF LEBANESE CIVIL WAR THIS IMMEMORIAL PATTERN COULD PERHAPS HAVE BEEN BROKEN HAD THE NEW PRESIDENT EXERTED DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP. THERE WAS A GENERAL WILLINGNESS TO FOLLOW ANY RATIONAL PROGRAM HE MIGHT PROPOSE AND HE WAS NOT ONLY GIVEN LEGISLATIVE CARTE BLANCHE AND AT LEAST THE PRO FORMA SUPPORT OF ALL THE POLITICAL FACTIONS, HE WAS ALSO GIVEN THE SUPPORT OF IMPORTANT OUTSIDE POWERS, INCLUDING SYRIA AND THE UNITED STATES. INSTEAD OF GRASPING THESE ASSETS AND USING THEM FULLY, SARKIS PLAYED A VERY CAUTIOUS GAME AND QUICKLY LOST FLYING SPEED.

4. HIS DEFENSE IS THAT HE HAD NOTHING TO START WITH AND THAT HE STILL HAS LITTLE IN HIS HANDS. MEANWHILE, HE HAS BEEN SNIPED AT BY THE POLITICIANS AND HIS EFFORTS AT PROGRESS BLOCKED AT EVERY HAND BY THE TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN LEADERS. THERE IS MUCH TRUTH IN WHAT HE SAYS, BUT HE ALSO IS NOT THE SORT OF PERSON TO PROVIDE DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP NO MATTER WHAT THE CONDITIONS. RATHER, HE IS A MAN WHO WORKS QUIETLY BEHIND THE SCENES. HE REMAINS IN HIS PALACE AT BAABDA AND DOES NOT COME OUT. HE DOES NOT APPEAR ON TELEVISION OR MAKE SPEECHES OR DEDICATE HOSPITALS OR KISS BABIES OR GET OUT AND RUB SHOULDERS WITH THE PEOPLE. HE DOES NOT DO ANY OF THE THINGS A POLITICAL LEADER MUST DO IF HE IS TO IMPOSE HIS PERSONALITY ON THE COUNTRY.

5. THE CABINET IS FORMED OF GOOD MEN WHO ARE NON-POLITICAL (EX-SECRET

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CEPT FOR FOREIGN MINISTER FUAD BOUTROS). IN GENERAL THEY HAVE LITTLE RELEVANT PRIOR EXPERIENCE. THE PRIME MINISTER IS AN ACADEMIC WITH A SPECIALTY IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION. THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR IS AN EAR, NOSE AND THROAT SPECIALIST. THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WELFARE IS A UROLOGIST. THE MINISTER OF HEALTH WENT TO MEDICAL SCHOOL IN EGYPT, BUT IS ESSENTIALLY A POLITICAL HACK. THE MINISTRY OF PTT IS HELD BY THE MINISTER OF FINANCE, WHO IS A BANKER. THE MINISTERS OF INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC WORKS DO HAVE SOME RELEVANT BACKGROUND, BUT THEY ARE POLITICALLY POWERLESS. WHILE MOST OF THEM CAME INTO OFFICE WITH BRIGHT HOPES OF DOING SOMETHING, THESE HOPES HAVE FADED BEFORE THE MAGNITUDE OF THEIR TASK AND THE OBSTACLES WITH WHICH ANY LEBANESE GOVERNMENT MUST COPE. IN GENERAL, THEY HAVE BEEN FORCED TO ADOPT A STATIC APPROACH, WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO TURN UP, AND FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO START SPONTANEOUSLY, ONCE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN SECURITY RETURNS.

6. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT THERE HAS NOT BEEN PROGRESS. MUCH NEEDED LEGISLATION HAS BEEN ENACTED, PUBLIC SERVICES ARE SLOWLY IMPROVING, THE RETAIL TRADE IS RECOVERING, PORT ACTIVITY IS UP, THERE WILL BE A MODEST TOURIST SEASON THIS YEAR, RESTAURANTS, CINEMAS, ETC., ARE OPEN, SCHOOLS ARE FUNCTIONING NORMALLY, ETC.

VERY LITTLE HAS BEEN DONE ABOUT RECONSTRUCTION, HOWEVER, AND

SUCH INDUSTRY AS THERE IS IS LARGELY MORIBUND. THE BANKS HAVE A LARGE, UNHEALTHY LIQUIDITY SURPLUS BECAUSE NO ONE IS WILLING TO BORROW OR INVEST HIS MONEY BECAUSE A) CREDIT TERMS ARE SO HARD AND B) MORE IMPORTANTLY, INVESTORS FEAR THE SECURITY SITUATION WILL DETERIORATE. IN SHORT, THERE IS A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE. IT IS DUE ESSENTIALLY TO DOUBTS ABOUT CONTINUING SECURITY IN THE PRESENCE OF HEAVILY ARMED PALESTINIANS AND THE ABSENCE OF AN EFFECTIVE LEBANESE ARMY, AS WELL AS TO CONTINUED LACK OF A NATIONAL POLITICAL CONSENSUS AS TO HOW THE COUNTRY SHOULD BE ORGANIZED. IF THE GOL MAKES SOME PROGRESS ON THE CAIRO ACCORD AND THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH (THE COMING WEEKEND WILL GIVE A CLUE AS TO THE CHANCES), A NATIONAL POLITICAL CONSENSUS MAY BECOME POSSIBLE, AND
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THE ECONOMY WILL REVIVE. IF, ON OTHER HAND, THERE IS NO PROGRESS ON THESE ISSUES, CAPITAL INVESTMENT AND INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITY ARE LIKELY TO BE VERY SLOW IN RESUMING.

7. POLITICAL.

THE BASIC QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE SHAPE OF LEBANON REMAIN UNANSWERED. THERE IS NOT MUCH TALK TODAY OF PARTITION, BUT THE ISSUE IS STILL VERY REAL WHATEVER VARIOUS LEBANESE LEADERS MAY SAY. MANY MARONITES ARE STILL UNWILLING TO ACCEPT THE MOSLEMS AS EQUAL PARTNERS AND ARE STILL OPERATING THE BELIEF THAT A REPUBLIC OF MT. LEBANON IS THEIR HOLE CARD. THEY FEEL THAT IF WORST COMES TO WORST, AND THEY CANNOT REACH AN UNDERSTANDING WHICH LEAVES THEM IN A DOMINANT POSITION IN GREATER LEBANON, THEY CAN ALWAYS WITHDRAW TO THEIR REDOUBT IN MT. LEBANON. THIS DOES NOT MAKE FOR TRACTABILITY.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 3691

EXDIS

XIM THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT IS STRUGGLING ALONG WITH A MINIMUM OF SUPPORT, AND MUCH OPPOSITION, FROM THE MARONITE RIGHT WHILE THE SUNNI MOSLEMS OF BEIRUT, ONCE A DYNAMIC FACTOR IN LEBANESE POLITICS, SIT ON THEIR HANDS FOR LACK OF LEADERSHIP AND THE SHIA OF THE SOUTH FLEE THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE COUNTRY. FOR MOST LEBANESE WHO CAN RESUME BUSINESS AS USUAL WITHOUT OUTSIDE HELP, BUSINESS IS RESUMED. FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT, THERE IS LITTLE TO DO BUT WAIT. MEANWHILE, LITTLE PROGRESS IS MADE TOWARDS A NATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OR CONSENSUS. IF THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS ON THE CAIRO ACCORD PRODUCE RESULTS, THIS MAY CHANGE, AS NOTED ABOVE, BUT WE CAN STILL BE CONFIDENT THAT THE GOL'S APPROACH TO PROBLEMS WILL NOT BE DYNAMIC.

9. MILITARY.

A PRINCIPAL FACTOR, OR NON-FACTOR, IN THE EQUATION IS THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY, WHICH REMAIN PARALYZED BY THE SAME POLITICAL AND CONFESSIONAL DIVISIONS THAT PARALYZE THE GOVERNMENT. THE NEW COMMANDING GENERAL, BRIGADIER GENERAL KHOURY, IS MAKING A DETERMINED EFFORT TO CREATE A UNIFIED ARMY. HE HAS VERY LITTLE TO
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WORK WITH. HE IS GETTING ALMOST NO SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND THE POLITICAINS AND VERY LITTLE HELP FROM ABROAD. THE AMERICANS, ON WHOM HE HAS BEEN COUNTING FOR HELP, HAVE YET TO COME THROUGH WITH A FIRM OFFER OF ANYTHING. THE SAUDIS HAVE SENT SOME BEDDING, THE FRENCH HAVE GIVEN HIM SOME UNIFORMS ORIGINALLY DESIGNED FOR UNDERSIZED CAMBODIANS, AND THE JORDANIANS HAVE GIVEN THEM SOME SURPLUS ARMORED CARS WHICH THEY ARE AFRAID TO BRING OVER TO BEIRUT FOR FEAR THEY WILL BE SEIZED BY THE CHRISTIAN OR PALESTINIAN MILITIAS. IT REMINDS ONE OF SOME COMIC OPERA BALKAN PRINCIPALITY RULED BY PETER USTINOV.

10. I UNDERSTAND THAT NEA HAS BEEN ABLE TO RELIEVE THE DOUBTS OF SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE AND THAT WE ARE GOING TO PROCEED WITH AN OFFER OF FMS CREDITS TO THE VALUE OF \$25 MILLION. I HOPE WE CAN IN FACT COME UP WITH THIS BECAUSE IT WOULD GIVE A PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST TO THE LEBANESE ESTABLISHMENT. I DON'T THINK WE NEED HAVE ANY ILLUSIONS THAT THERE WILL BE ANY STARTLING RE-

SULTS IMMEDIATELY, BUT I THINK WITH PATIENCE AND FLEXIBILITY WE CAN GET THE LEBANESE EVENTUALLY TO FIELD AN EFFECTIVE MILITARY FORCE.

11. SOUTHERN LEBANON.

PRESS AND INTELLIGENCE REPORTS INDICATE SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO ACCORD AND INSTITUTION OF A CEASE-FIRE IN THE SOUTH. WE REMAIN WARY, ALTHOUGH LESS SO THAN EARLIER IN THE WEEK. EVEN IF, AS SEEMS TO BE THE CASE, THE PALESTINIAN MODERATES MEAN WHAT THEY SAY, IMPLEMENTATION IS GOING TO BE DIFFICULT, ONE REASON BEING THE LACK OF RELIABLE LEBANESE FORCES WHICH CAN BE USED TO POLICE THE AGREEMENT. MORE IMPORTANTLY, IRAQI-BACKED PALESTINIAN GROUPS HAVE REJECTED, WHILE CHRISTIAN REJECTIONISTS AND ISRAELIS HAVE TO DATE NOT COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO, A CEASE-FIRE IN THE SOUTH. INDEED, FIGHTING IN THE PAST FEW DAYS
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HAS BEEN FIERCER THAN IT WAS THE WEEK BEFORE. ALTHOUGH USE OF UN FORCES IS NOT GOING TO BE A PANACEA, I AM INCREASINGLY CONVINCED THAT ONLY THE INTERPOSITION OF SUCH AN EXTERNAL FORCE IS GOING TO PRODUCE A VIABLE CEASE-FIRE.

12. PRESIDENT SARKIS AND BOUTROS ARE BOTH RELUCTANT TO ASK FOR UN FORCES. THEIR RELUCTANCE IS A REFLECTION IN THE FIRST PLACE OF THEIR GENERALLY CAUTIOUS APPROACH, BUT THERE ARE ALSO RATIONAL REASONS FOR IT. ONE IS THAT INSTALLATION OF UN FORCE WOULD STILL LEAVE THE PALESTINIANS IN OCCUPATION OF MOST OF SOUTH LEBANON. THEY WOULD FURTHERMORE BE PROTECTED FROM ISRAELIS AND MARONITES AND UNLESS SOME WAY COULD BE FOUND TO MOVE THEM OUT OF THAT AREA THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR HOLD INTO A PERMANENT ONE. ACCORDING TO SOME OF OUR CONTACTS, PRESIDENT SARKIS IS NOT SURE THAT THIS IS NOT ACTUALLY OUR PLAN, I.E. TO CREATE THE PALESTINIAN ENTITY IN SOUTH LEBANON RATHER THAN ON THE WEST BANK.

13. I DON'T KNOW HOW THE PALESTINIANS CAN BE LURED OUT OF SOUTH LEBANON, BUT IF THE SYRIANS, THE SAUDIS, AND EGYPTIANS ARE PREPARED TO USE THEIR INFLUENCE, THE REJECTIONISTS COULD PERHAPS BE ISOLATED AND PERHAPS WINKLED OUT IN TIME. I DO NOT THINK THIS PROBLEM SHOULD PREVENT OUR SUPPORTING THE IDEA OF A UN FORCE, BUT IT IS SOMETHING TO KEEP IN MIND AS NEEDING TO BE DEALT WITH.

14. WITH REGARD TO THE ATTITUDE OF THE OTHER ARABS, PRESIDENT ASAD IS THE ONLY ONE OF THE ARAB LEADERS WHO HAS SO FAR EVINCED MUCH REAL COMPREHENSION OF WHAT IS ACTUALLY GOING ON ON THE GROUND IN THE SOUTH. I SAY THAT BECAUSE I RECALL THE RED HERRING ABOUT A 500-MAN FORCE THAT SADAT PULLED ACROSS THE TRAIL ON YOUR LAST VISIT TO EGYPT. EGYPTIANS IN CAIRO DO NOT UNDERSTAND COMPLICATED LEBANESE INTERNAL PROBLEMS VERY WELL. WHILE WE CANNOT AVOID LISTENING TO SADAT'S REMARKS ABOUT LEBANON, WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL

ABOUT TAKING THEM TOO SERIOUSLY.

15. MISCELLANEOUS.

THERE IS ONE QUESTION WHICH NEITHER SARKIS NOR BOUTROS WILL PUT
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TO YOU BUT WHICH WILL BE VERY MUCH ON THEIR MINDS, AND THAT IS
THE QUESTIONS OF THE VISITS BOTH OF THEM WOULD LIKE TO MAKE TO
THE UNITED STATES. I DO NOT KNOW WHAT THE DEPARTMENT HAS DECIDED
IN THIS REGARD BUT HOPE YOU CAN SAY SOMETHING POSITIVE TO SARKIS
ABOUT A VISIT NEXT YEAR. HE REALLY WOULD LIKE TO GO THIS YEAR.
THE REASONS ARE POLITICAL. HE FEELS IT WOULD BE A VERY USEFUL
BOOST TO HIS POSITION. IF WE CANNOT ACCEPT SARKIS THIS YEAR,
BOUTROS WOULD LIKE VERY MUCH TO GO. PERHAPS YOU COULD SUGGEST
THAT BOUTROS, IF HE ATTENDS THE UN SESSION, COULD COME DOWN TO
WASHINGTON TO MEET THE PRESIDENT.

16. YOU SHOULD ALSO BE ALERT TO THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE PRESS
WILL TRY TO ASK YOU IF SARKIS IS INVITED AND, IF NOT, WHY NOT.
PARKER

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